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ABSTRACT

The First Impressions initiative was created in 1987 by Governor Roy Romer of Colorado to increase public awareness of the critical importance of the first 5 years of life, assist communities in developing effective programs for young children and their families, and influence early childhood policy and practice. In 1991-92, the priorities of First Impressions were to: (1) build community coalitions to address early childhood issues locally; (2) stimulate the development of innovative initiatives that improve the lives of young children and their families; (3) assist in developing a statewide children and families agenda; and (4) promote the concept of community investment in early childhood as an investment in the future. Activities focusing on these priorities included community forums on families and children, the creation of an Early Childhood Professional Standards Task Force, the expansion of the Parents As First Teachers program, and the exploration of options for reducing parents' travel related to child care. Other accomplishments included the expansion of Colorado's statewide system of child care resource and referral, the creation of the Colorado Business and Child Care Council to assess and promote private sector involvement in child care, and coordination of a strategic plan for Colorado's families and children. Throughout the year, Governor Romer and First Impressions' staff pursued various avenues to heighten public awareness of the issues of young children. (AC)

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS: GOVERNOR ROY ROMER'S INITIATIVE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

YEAR-END REPORT
July 1991 - June 1992

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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Greetings,

As chairperson of First Impressions, I would like to take a minute to tell you, in this 1991-1992 Year-End Report, about First Impressions, Governor Romer's initiative on early childhood.

First Impressions was created by the Governor in 1987. Our mission is to increase public awareness about the critical importance of the first 60 months of life, develop innovative solutions and encourage community responsibility and responsiveness to the issues of young children and their families. Our work focuses on all significant aspects of young children's lives, including health care, nutrition, early childhood care and education, recreation, mental health and parent support.

We are guided in what we do by three principles. First, we believe that the early years of a child's life form the foundation for a lifetime. The character of children and the kind of person, student, citizen and parent they will become are generally formed by the time a child reaches school age.

A second principle guiding us is that the parent-child relationship is the most important relationship in a young child's life. The challenge to every family is to provide for the health, safety and security of its members. Every family member must have food, shelter and clothing, but family functions go far beyond meeting these basic needs. A family also must, through its nurturing, endow its members with a sense of hope, will and purpose.

The third principle is that the community in which children and families live is the best place for help and support to be offered. Through First Impressions, we are working with local communities and a network of early childhood professionals to help create an environment where families can flourish.

I believe that First Impressions has been successful in helping Colorado become a better place for children and families to live. This success is an outcome of the Governor's unwavering commitment to early childhood issues and the collaborative nature of all of our efforts.

This Year-End Report provides an overview of First Impressions' accomplishments during the past year. If you would like more detailed information on any of our projects please contact the First Impressions office at (303) 866-2974.

Sincerely,

Bea Romer

Bea Romer
First Lady of Colorado

AN OVERVIEW OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First Impressions was created in 1987, by Governor Roy Romer for the specific purpose of:

- Creating public awareness about the importance of the first five years of life
- Assisting communities in the development of effective programs for young children and their families, and
- Impacting policy and practices that affect young children and their families

Located in the Governor's Office, First Impressions operates as part of the Governor's Policy and Initiatives cluster. First Impressions is chaired by Mrs. Bea Romer, First Lady of Colorado, and advised by a council. The council is appointed by the Governor, and is comprised of leaders in the fields related to young children and their families.

First Impressions is staffed by the Deputy Director of the Governor's Policy and Initiatives cluster; a Director; a Parents As First Teachers coordinator; a special projects coordinator; a policy analyst; a staff assistant; and a half-time press specialist. Volunteers and paid consultants assist with special projects.

Over the past five years, First Impressions has established a number of programs that are intended to improve outcomes for young children and their families. This report describes the progress made toward meeting four of First Impressions' identified priorities for 1991-1992:

1. Build community coalitions to address early childhood issues in local communities
2. Stimulate the development of innovative initiatives that improve the lives of young children and their families
3. Assist in developing a children and families agenda for the state of Colorado
4. Promote the importance of the early childhood years and market the concept of community investment in early childhood issues as an investment in the future

FIRST IMPRESSIONS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since its inception, First Impressions has made significant accomplishments on behalf of young children. Some of the most notable include:

Worked with the Legislature to create the Colorado Preschool Program, a highly successful preschool program for four-year-olds at risk of school failure.

Developed a Parents As First Teachers initiative and secured federal funding for 13 projects in school districts across the state. Parents As First Teachers also is creating a statewide parent support network comprised of educators, business and foundation representatives and legislators.

Analyzed the child care delivery system in Colorado. As an outcome of this effort, the Office of Child Care Services was created within the Department of Social Services to streamline the licensing process for family child care providers and child care centers and to better assist parents.

Directed the development of a statewide system of child care resource and referral.

Convened and staffed a Governor appointed Business and Child Care Council, comprised of executives from Colorado businesses. The council worked to identify the level of employer involvement in child care and created strategies to increase involvement.

Established a consortium of 16 businesses to start an early childhood care and education center in Denver's Central Business District. The center, located along a major transit corridor, will include scholarships for children from low-income families using public transportation.

Staffed a policy academy team of high level decision-makers in developing a strategic plan to improve outcomes for Colorado's at-risk families and children. As a result of this planning process, First Impressions worked with other organizations to conduct eight forums to help stimulate community action on behalf of families and children and to solicit community response to the Strategic Plan for Families and Children.

Initiated a task force to study the need for consistent standards for early childhood professionals and to develop a model for an integrated career development system for early childhood professionals.

Convened a statewide team to assist Colorado communities in successfully achieving Goal One of the National Education Goals.

BUILDING COMMUNITY COALITIONS

COMMUNITY FORUMS ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

During the summer and fall of 1991, the Colorado Commission on Families and Children, the Governor's Office, the Colorado Children's Campaign and Public Service Company of Colorado sponsored forums in Boulder, Vail, Greeley, Canon City, Steamboat Springs, Sterling, Pueblo and Denver. The purpose of the forums was to elicit input from a diverse group of community members on the draft Strategic Plan for Colorado's Families and Children.

Forums were patterned after successful community meetings that First Impressions had sponsored in previous years. With the help of a community leader, First Impressions staff worked with the Colorado Children's Campaign and a local planning committee to coordinate various aspects of the forum involving local sponsorship, publicity, facility arrangements, community facilitators and follow-up activities. Training sessions for local facilitators were held prior to the forum.

To advertise the forums, a report card was developed which asked citizens to evaluate how responsive their community was to families and children. Forums began with opening remarks by Governor Romer, followed by short presentations by Mrs. Romer and First Impressions' staff. Participants worked in small groups to discuss topics ranging from parenting to prenatal care, education to health care, and child care to family centers. Small groups presented highlights of their discussion to the larger group. These presentations were compiled by First Impressions and sent out to all forum participants.

The following summarizes feedback from forum participants:

Current Barriers to Healthy and Productive Families:
The two most often cited barriers to healthy and productive families were the lack of accessible, affordable, quality child care and the inaccessibility of health care, often due to the lack of health insurance. Other barriers included lack of information on available resources, fragmented services, distrust of governmental agencies and inflexible regulations.

Changes That Are Currently Needed:
Each community believed that coordinated, flexible, "stigma-free", community based services were needed for all families. They believed that state funds should be prioritized and directed into prevention and early intervention programs and suggested that a program accountability system be initiated. The value of collaborative efforts among state agencies, county agencies, foundations, private service providers, school districts and businesses was recognized.

GOAL ONE

In 1989, the nation's 50 governors and President George Bush agreed on six national goals to move our schools into the 21st century. These goals, which range from addressing graduation rates to adult literacy, provide a helpful framework for organizing reform activities and for increasing public awareness about the importance of education. First Impressions is working with a statewide goal team and the Governor's Colorado 2000 Communities initiative to support communities as they work to successfully achieve the first of the national education goals.

Goal One, considered to be the early childhood goal, states that "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn." Further, the goal states that all disadvantaged and disabled children will have access to quality preschool programs; that training and support will be available to parents in their role as their child's first teacher; and that children will have access to nutrition, health care and prenatal care.

Over the past year First Impressions has:

- Established a statewide goal one team that provides information and technical assistance to communities on early childhood issues. The team is comprised of representatives from statewide networks including the Colorado Children's Campaign, the Colorado Forum, the Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children, the Colorado Association of Family Child Care, the Colorado Education Association; Head Start, Colorado Department of Health, the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Child Care Association.

- Prepared a widely distributed Goal One report which addresses "readiness" issues; identifies barriers to achieving the goal; provides a community needs assessment; and lists available resources.

- Compiled data and indicators on Goal One for Colorado's annual report card which measures progress in meeting the goals.

- Given numerous presentations on Goal One and Colorado's achievement strategies to community action groups, business leaders and early childhood associations.

TRAINING MANUALS

A "how-to" manual on conducting community forums will be published by First Impressions in September 1992. This manual is based on experiences from community forums conducted by First Impressions over the past five years. It will include interviews with facilitators, planning and communication strategies and suggestions for creating community buy-in. A training manual for facilitators of small group discussions also has been developed.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS' CLEARINGHOUSE

A broad range of information relating to young children and their families is available to callers through the First Impressions' early childhood clearinghouse. In the past year, staff estimates that they responded to over 5,000 calls for information.

STATE EFFORTS TEAM

First Impressions coordinates a State Efforts Team which meets regularly for the purpose of improving communication and enhancing collaboration between state health and human service agencies. The group includes representatives from the Colorado Department of Health; the Colorado Department of Education; the Colorado Division of Mental Health; the Office of State Planning and Budget; and the Colorado Department of Social Services.

DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS TASK FORCE

As the need for early childhood care and education programs increases, so do the accompanying demands for qualified staff. Yet there is a critical shortage of trained early childhood teachers and administrators. While the number of people entering the field is at an all time low, more than four out of 10 early childhood educators in Colorado leave the field each year. Professional dissatisfaction is attributed to low pay, lack of benefits and absence of professional respect and recognition.

Individuals who wish to remain in the field and move ahead professionally are faced with many road blocks. Because a number of different state and federal departments regulate early childhood programs, there are no consistent requirements for staff. There are problems with articulation of credits between training institutions (i.e., two year college program credits may not substitute for credit toward a four year degree). Further, an effective system is not in place to uniformly translate competencies gained on the job into any crediting system.

In December 1991, Governor Romer established an Early Childhood Professional Standards Task Force. Many other children's advocates served on resource groups which provided technical assistance to task force members. Task force members were asked to encourage standardization of training and requirements for early care and education professionals; to identify core knowledge and competencies needed by all early childhood professionals; and to construct a career development model that creates incentives for early care and education professionals to remain in the field.

Over the past year, First Impressions has:

- Coordinated a statewide conference on professional development for early childhood educators, administrators, advocates, trainers and state and local government representatives.
- Staffed the Early Childhood Professional Standards Task Force and resource groups.
- Secured scholarship funds from the National Association for the Education of Young Children to send a state team to the National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development conference.
- Compiled task force recommendations and action steps into a comprehensive report which will be published and submitted to Governor Romer in September 1992. This report describes a career development model for early childhood professionals and strategies for achieving it.

COLORADO PARENTS AS FIRST TEACHERS

The most powerful influence in a young child's life is the relationship of the child to the parent. Some early childhood education programs, such as Head Start have recognized that a combination of a stimulating early learning setting with a strong parent education and support component is the most effective strategy in helping children to become productive, self-sufficient adult citizens.

Through an effective partnership between early childhood educators and parents, gains made by young children are strengthened and the likelihood that those gains will hold over time is greatly enhanced. In addition, strengthening the parent's ability to nurture and guide their own child's development is pivotal in preventing an array of costly societal problems such as child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, gang violence, school drop-out and juvenile delinquency.

Undoubtedly, supporting parents as their child's first and foremost teacher is fundamental to reducing the risk factors for later school failure. A key to ensuring that parents develop the abilities and confidence to be successful in this role lies in improving the skills and changing the attitudes of those who work with children and parents. The Parents As First Teachers project, a three year project of First Impressions, seeks to create a statewide system of parent education and support. Funding for the overall project has been provided by U S West.

In the past year, Parents As First Teachers has:

- Developed a training model for professionals who work with parents in a variety of settings. The training emphasizes supporting parental strengths and strengthening the parent-child relationship. Training has been piloted through Head Start and the Denver Public Schools.
- Coordinated a parent educators' network with the goal of establishing a support system and professional association for specialists working with families.
- Assisted the Community College of Denver's Work and Family Resource Center in developing a "Helpline" for parents.
- Secured federal funding for 13 parent support and education programs in school districts across the state. The projects included both home-based and school-based programs.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY/CHILD CARE PROJECT

In Colorado, 56 percent of mothers with children under the age of six are in the workforce. As this number continues to increase, the transportation of children to and from child care has been identified as a significant factor in increased energy consumption. An estimated increase of 28 percent additional driving is added to a daily commute when parents drop off and pick up children at child care.

One of the most effective ways that parents can conserve energy is to drive less often. In September 1990, First Impressions received funding from the Colorado Office of Energy Conservation to pilot a project which would explore the relationship between energy conservation and child care needs. The expected outcome of the project is to improve energy efficiency by reducing the number of driving trips parents must make between home, work and child care facilities.

Over the past year, First Impressions has:

- Created a consortium of 16 employers who have invested start-up funds for a work-site based child care center. The center will be located in Denver's Central Business District, close to a major transportation hub or transit line. Scholarship funds will be available to low income parents using public transit.
- Supported the development of a comprehensive "how-to" manual for employers wishing to implement a Flexplace or telecommuting program in their company.
- Supported the development of an "Alternative Work Options" clearinghouse which will match employees who are seeking flexible work schedules with employers who are offering these options.
- Hosted a series of seminars for child care providers, commercial real estate developers and licensing specialists to encourage partnerships on behalf of work-site based child care.
- Contracted with a research team at the University of Colorado-Denver's Department of Economics to conduct research examining the impact of on-site child care programs on energy conservation efforts.

COLORADO'S STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF CHILD CARE RESOURCE AND REFERRAL

Demographic projections show dramatic increases in the number of single and dual-earner families that participate in the work force and have young children. This trend will continue as the labor pool shrinks and families rely on two incomes to make ends meet. For Colorado, the implication is clear -- when early childhood programs are not available, parents cannot work. To enable families to care for themselves and ensure a healthy economy, Colorado needs an early childhood care and education system that is responsive to demand for high quality, affordable and accessible programs.

Committed to the belief that a community-based child care resource and referral system would improve the current system of child care delivery, First Impressions was asked by the Governor to facilitate a process to develop this system on a statewide basis. Over a period of two years, First Impressions and a "Design Team" comprised of members of the Colorado Child Care Resource and Referral Network and other early childhood professionals developed a systems plan which is now being implemented.

Colorado's Child Care Resource and Referral System helps parents locate and select early childhood care and education programs; recruits, trains and provides technical assistance to early childhood providers; consults with and offers direct services to employers wishing to implement work and family-related benefits; and collects supply and demand data to support community planning efforts.

Over the past year, First Impressions, the Colorado Child Care Resource and Referral Network and the Office of Child Care Services have:

- Accessed funds from the American Express Philanthropic Foundation to create the Colorado Office of Resource and Referral Agencies (CORRA). CORRA which was established in June 1991, serves as the centralized office for the system.
- Secured significant funds from the new federal Child Care and Development Block Grant to support community resource and referral services to parents, child care providers, employers and the community.
- Provided support and administrative oversight to CORRA as the statewide system infrastructure matured.

THE COLORADO BUSINESS AND CHILD CARE COUNCIL

The State of Colorado's economic health has come to depend on the work force involvement of parents with young children. This participation is contingent upon the availability and access parents have to affordable, quality child care. Moreover, at a time when the need for more highly educated and technically skilled workers is escalating, it has become apparent that quality child care programs can get children off to a good start, ready to learn and succeed.

Government cannot make, build and maintain a system of high quality child care alone. In December 1989, Governor Romer issued an executive order establishing the Colorado Business and Child Care Council. The creation of the council was based on the belief that it will take strong partnerships between government, businesses, parents and educators to successfully meet this challenge.

The Business and Child Care Council was comprised of 16 business leaders -- CEO's and vice-presidents representing large and small businesses from across the state. First Impressions, staffed and facilitated the process and coordinated efforts with the Department of Social Services and the Office of Business Development. The results of their efforts were in response to their charge from the Governor to determine the existing level of private sector involvement in child care statewide; establish a process by which employers can receive information about the impact of child care issues on doing business; and to develop strategies to increase employer involvement in child care.

Over the past year, First Impressions has:

- Compiled a directory of businesses which details work and family-related programs and policies.
- Worked with the Colorado Office of Business Development to create a fact sheet for employers on workplace initiatives.
- Distributed information packets to businesses throughout the state.
- Provided technical assistance to employers seeking information or wishing to implement child care related programs or policies.
- Hosted several events with top level executives to stimulate top-down interest in these issues.
- Hosted an awards ceremony at the Governor's Mansion to acknowledge companies that are leaders in this arena.

FEDERAL DEPENDENT CARE GRANT

First Impressions administers the Federal Dependent Care and Planning Grant. In 1991, Colorado received $171,000. Sixty percent of this grant was earmarked for the development of school-age child care which was subcontracted through Red Rocks Community College. Forty percent of the grant was targeted toward the development and planning of resource and referral agencies.

STATE AS A MODEL EMPLOYER

In 1989, Governor Romer issued an Executive Order directing the State Department of Personnel to develop "family friendly" work practices and policies for all state employees. Since that time, First Impressions has provided technical assistance relating to child care and work/family programs for state employees.

DEVELOPING A CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AGENDA FOR THE STATE

THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR COLORADO'S FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

The State of Colorado, under the leadership of Governor Romer, has undertaken a substantial effort to ensure that Colorado is able to remain a healthy and economically productive state. The Strategic Plan for Colorado's Families and Children , developed by a Policy Academy team comprised of top-level decision makers and coordinated by First Impressions, recognizes that the family is the bridge to a successful Colorado. The strategic plan is about making governmental systems -- education, human services and economic -- more capable of strengthening the family's ability to function.

Over the past year, progress has been made in implementing the strategic plan:

- **The Colorado Commission on Families and Children** and the **Cabinet Council on Families and Children** were established in 1990 to advise the Governor in the development of policies and positions on families and children. The Cabinet Council is vested with the authority to change the way government operates related to families and children's programs.

- Initial progress was made by the Cabinet Council in moving forward with a full families and children **program budget.** A program budget crosses departmental lines and uses all available dollars, regardless of source to achieve the policy priorities of the administration.

- Based on a literature review, a **Family Impact Analysis** instrument was developed by a subcommittee of the Commission, and tested in seven state agencies. The instrument was designed as a self-study tool to analyze existing policies, practices and forms for impact on families and children.

- Eight **Family Center** planning grants have been awarded and a six-month planning phase is underway. A second wave of funding will be offered in February 1993. The purpose of family centers is to provide comprehensive, intensive, integrated and community-based services at a single point of entry to families in communities at-risk.

PROMOTING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

PUBLIC AWARENESS

In 1991, Governor Romer, served as the chair of the National Education Goals Panel. Proclaiming early childhood education as a top priority in his agenda, Governor Romer now chairs the National Governor's Association and the Democratic Governor's Association. Nationally recognized for his commitment to improving education, Governor Romer also has keynoted several large national early childhood conferences including the annual National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Children's Defense Fund conferences.

As First Impressions' chairperson, Bea Romer, has focused a great deal of her professional attention on early childhood care and education. Through her public outreach efforts, including public speaking and active participation in both local and national initiatives, she continues to draw media attention and public awareness to the issues of children and families. Mrs. Romer, through her service on several national boards including the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Child Care Action Campaign and the Family Resource Coalition, also brings national attention to the issues of young children. First Impressions estimates that more than 500 public presentations were made in 1991.

BIRTHDAY CARDS

First Impressions, in collaboration with several other groups and funding from the Department of Education, sends out "birthday messages" from the Governor and Mrs. Romer to all parents of Colorado newborns. Included in this message are resources about parenting, child development milestones, child care, information on immunization, a birth certificate and safety restraint materials. Volunteers address and stuff the envelopes. Approximately 60,000 cards were sent this year.

PUBLICATIONS

First Impressions publishes a quarterly newsletter which highlights Colorado-based programs that provide innovative and effective programs to young children and their families. A First Impressions' brochure is available to anyone desiring general information on the initiative.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS' ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

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The Honorable Bonnie Allison
Colorado State Senator

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Bea Romer **Chairperson**

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